(a) whether it is a fact that the jawans at various centres of the Ministry of Defence are being recruited through corrupt means and without proper verification of their character antecedents; and

(b) if so, what steps are being taken by Government to ensure that no corrupt means are adopted at any level at the time of recruitment of jawans?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) and (b) Recruitment of jawans is done through fair and transparent means and after proper verification of character and antecedents. There are however, complaints alleging corruption in the recruitment of jawans, which are being investigated and officials found guilty of corruption or any other misconduct, will be acted against appropriately.

Encounter with Pak Army

2291. SHRIMATI KAMALA SINHA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Indian army has been recently engaged in one of the fiercest encounters with Pak army in the border areas close to the line of control in Kupwara district in Jammu and Kashmir;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) what action has been taken by Government in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) to (c) There has been an increase in exchange of artillery and mortar fire along the Line of Control in the Kupwara district due to Pak efforts to give covering fire to the infiltrators. There have been some casualties on our side due to Pakistani firing.

A constant vigil is maintained on the border by our troops who are well-equipped and prepared to face any attempt at misadventure on the part of our adversaires.

Arrest of Smugglers

2292. SHRI YADLAPATI VENKAT RAO:
SHRIMATI JAYAPRADA NAHATA:

Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Indian Navy and Coast Guards arrested armed smugglers near Andaman and Nicobar Islands on 31st May, 1998;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the steps taken to protest to the countries from where smugglers start their activities and to increase patrol in Indian waters to stop such activities?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) to (c) The Indian Navy with the support of Coast Guard launched an operation on 30 May 98 to apprehend/destroy the trawlers, which according to a specific military intelligence, were carrying arms, ammunition and explosives and were likely to transit through Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

On 30 May 98, two trawlers were detected at a distance of 60 nautical miles North East of Narcondom island moving in a suspicious manner. When the Naval units were homed in to intercept them, the crew of both trawlers jumped after scuttling the first trawler and 26 persons along with some ammunition were apprehended by the Naval units. The trawler sank in the water on 31 May 98. The second trawler was seen on fire resulting in minor explosion and the trawler is now lying submerged in Narcondom island.

All the apprehended persons were handed over to the local police at Port Blair and their interrogation is in progress.

Appropriate vigilance is being maintained by the armed forces for preventing the smuggling of arms in the North East region through the sea routes.